

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

THIS IS NOT

aka “for the fans”

A GAME

Our 21st Century entertainment expectations have seen us move as an audience from passive consumers to actively making our own, remixing the original story/brand for Youtube, writing our own reviews and connecting directly with the creators thanks to the Internet. Beyond integrated marketing lies transmedia storytelling.

Academic definition: transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story.

(Convergence Culture. Jenkins, 2006)

It is a way to be able to bring in all that you've learned about digital and blending it with traditional marketing.

HOWEVER it shouldn't be confused with “media neutral” or integrated marketing which tends to colour various channels with the same story & branding. The transmedia difference is that it makes for **deep** engagement with a few **vs. thin** interaction with many more.

The transmedia experience gets us sucked into a story through one medium, leaves us longing for more, offers deeper or different discoveries through other channels and also allows for us to be able to extract parts of that story reality into our everyday existence with songs, clothing or toys which again pull us back into the storyworld.

"Agencies typically make static objects that have no history or future and represent ideas that are somewhat plastic. Great ideas must weave themselves into the broader cultural zeitgeist."

- Conn Fishburn
former senior partner at Ogilvy, head of partner innovation at Yahoo

HIGH RISK ALERT

Transmedia just isn't a good fit for all brands - because it REQUIRES (obsessed) fans or be interesting enough to create a devoted community. They aren't the people who rush in to win a prize, they're there because they feel the brand/story/cause is an extension of their identity. No matter how hard you work it's statistically improbable that they'll be forming around a washing powder. Even if you have a Hollywood-sized budget.

We're used to brands extending successful brands into as many channels, sequels and stuff as the core idea can sustain. However, there should be a careful distinction between “transmedia storytelling (unique, valuable and independently viable contributions) and **transmedia branding** (cereal box promotions, “the making of” documentary and Happy Meal's)” (Long 2007).

FEELING SCAMMED. Fans often feel resentful that their feel their fandom is being squeezed for money, which quickly makes it plastic and commercial and **reduces the shelf-life of that story**. What many see as a major advance in retaining profit is seen by increasingly savvy audiences as exploitative licensing and marketing. Tread lightly, and remember the audience still controls the Internet.

The core transmedia story must operate on multiple levels. It needs to serve the primary or obvious role of entertainment/branding for passive experience; but offers deeper meaning and invitation to the curious who have noticed the clues which lead them “down the rabbit-hole” into the backstory that fans can follow and help co.create.

STORIES AS A FINANCIAL MODEL

a truly age-old way of making money



« We figured out how to make money off stories centuries ago. The grandest version to date has been Hollywood's marrying story to an economy of dizzying production costs, and reward. But it too has not been spared the digital assault. Transmedia has offered fresh promise to see massive entertainment productions unfolding across multiple realities, Hollywood is hopeful. You'll notice from case-studies that they're leading the charge, literally.

the Internet changes how we
TELL OUR STORIES

“Under the traditional model, when a big movie comes out, for example, we are offered the novelization, the adaptation in comics, and the video-game version for our Xboxes. It’s the same story over and over again, so the property is essentially milked until it’s dead.” - Jeff Gomez

Transmedia storytelling has multiple invitation points through different media that allow the community to become hunters and gatherers picking up clues and storylines to map the greater story. Or to add onto what exists with their own take, sometimes shifting the history and future of the original story or pushing secondary characters into the spotlight.

This applies not just to fiction or brand stories, but to documentaries or even to recontextualise shared histories of a people.

OPT-IN FOR ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT

Lines are very deliberately blurred between realities to create a compelling story. Creating pseudoscience that people could believe to be true (2012) or not ensuring that people OPT-IN to an alternate reality game (ARG) can have very dangerous or expensive legal consequences (Toyota “Stalker” campaign).

- Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) are often seen as one of the most dazzling elements in the magic toolbox of a transmedia storyteller. Creating parallel worlds that use the realworld as its playspace, and happen in realtime. They provide rich deep interactions, quests to fulfil and use multimedia of every description but are mostly centered online. Transmedia components are hypersocial, they need to be shareable for the audience to find others of their kind, and to engage back to the story creators.
- The stories must be structured to develop and grow, not be static or finished entities. As a creator you have to create sequences of surprise to keep the story evolving as well as opening it up for crowdsourced development.
- Building in cliffhangers and other narrative hooks that drive the audience to hunt for solutions or continuity help guide them from passive to active - brush up on these skills!



TRUE FANS MAKE THE TIME.. and costumes, fan films, games, sites..



*"The industry seems obsessed by engagement at the moment - building / offering brand engagement. But from a person, or communities, point of view - why should they engage with brands unless there is some value in the engagement?
 And if we're delivering value, they will care."* - Faris Yakob, MDC Partners

BRAIN HACK: Neurological research shows that encountering characters in different media **strengthens the emotional bond** to that character as we recognise the familiar in a fresh context.

WHY NOW?

Telling a compelling tale through different media to offer the point of view of others in the same story, make artifacts, sell merchandise, fans creating their own versions, songs, lines of clothing has been big at least since the Bible (still going strong 2000+ years on) readapted to media changes through the ages. The crowdsourcing and remixing of days of yore was diminished in the industrial era, when we became passive consumers of what companies produced for us. This type of participatory storytelling is back with a shiny new name: transmedia (thanks to Prof Henry Jenkins in 2003). Why, and why now?

1. **TECH.** We humans have new tools. The Internet allows for easy publication, distribution, organisation, multimedia and knowledge-sharing, which allows for rapid spreadability.
2. **ECONOMICS.** Giant media consortia have an economic imperative to maximize their intellectual property across their various channels (Time Warner holdings include some of the world’s most profitable: TV, magazines, games, films, comics properties). It affords a greater degree of consolidation of stories and cost-effective experimentation across their channels to find interesting new multiple streams of income.
3. **FACES.** Social media has meant we can see each others faces again. Our interactions have become more credible and durable because we’re not just faceless names or numbers.
4. **TRIBES.** We appropriate stories and mythologies that speak to us as individuals and connect tribally with others who do too. Stories become cultural activators. We also want to be able to do something more meaningful with that shared story that we couldn’t do on our own, or that just isn’t as much fun solo.



TV networks, Hollywood studios, big publishing houses holding too tightly onto copyright and defining in too narrow a scope what fans can do in terms of remixing and extending the brand, stifle engagement and limit the transmedia experience.

NOT ALL STORIES OFFER EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Opening certain parts of the story to crowdsourced extension and inviting fans in to remix the work while holding true to the original story is an ongoing curation. But George Lucas found 30 year success with Star Wars with doing just that.



create rich stories, open pathways in and allow for surprise with **TRANSMEDIA MANAGEMENT**

WORLDBUILDING SKILLS

“While most advertising agencies are paying lip service to transmedia storytelling, the majority don’t understand it. Intrinsic to this kind of approach are vast narratives - stories that are deep and compelling, that are set in worlds with rich histories.

Ad agencies don’t have creatives with the training to build these narratives. But that’s going to change in the next few years.” - Jeff Gomez (StarlightRunner)

To make your transmedia experience **ACCESSIBLE**, you need to connect with the audience..

1. **on their terms**
2. where they **already are**
3. with **tools that they’re already using**
4. in ways that they **already understand**

[From Brooke Thompson’s four step strategy to create an effective interactive transmedia experience: “(2009)"]

THE CAST OF 3

three roles essential to a transmedia production..

1

CREATOR

You need someone/team who can craft a story that is deep enough to allow for “forensic fandom”.

Transmedia stories need to be easy enough for passive consumption, rich enough to have a story too big for one medium that allows for the curious to dig deeper and find even more.

PATHMAKER

The channel development, executed by those who understand a wide variety of media and what each does best. Their job is to craft the “invitational” elements in each touchpoint to lure the fans in and offer participation and co-creation opportunities.

2

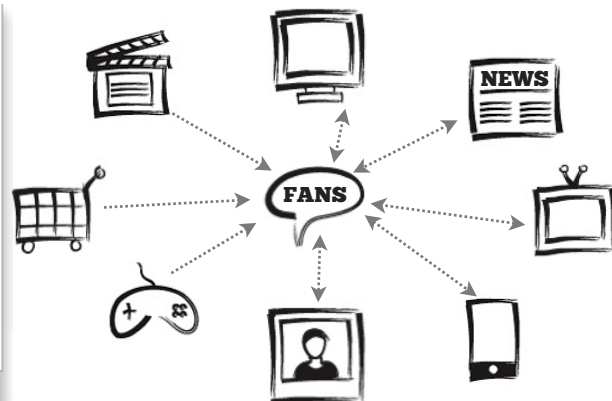
CURATOR

Once the story has been released and the pathways opened to allow for the story to be enriched by fan contribution ensuring the strength of the original story is undiluted and keeping the story connected between channels for consistency, you need those who curate this multidimensional world..

3

Avoid frustrating fans with inconsistencies in the greater narrative that can happen with outsourcing; different groups end up chasing different visions. Which is why large agencies with people to fill in roles in the Cast of 3 are more suited to the transmedia undertaking. If possible build it in from inception rather than tacking it on as an afterthought to wring more use and money out of the deal. It’s often spotted as such.

Pay close attention to which media can play interactively and make sure the story isn’t crossing the media/reality lines purely for merchandising. **It has to be fun and remarkable to hook a fan in.**



TRANSMEDIA PLANNING: it’s not media neutral planning

“I really like the transmedia planning model, because I think it addresses those **two weaknesses of media-neutral planning: ignoring that different media are better at different things, and that people are social beings.**”

“Switching from the current advertising model of *media-neutral planning* toward what Faris (Yakob) calls *transmedia planning*. The gist of it is that rather than using **different media channels to communicate the same idea**, you can use each channel to communicate different things. Everything is still tied together by the same brand strategy or narrative, but **each channel does what it does best**, rather than bending to fit an idea that’s not really built with any particular channel in mind.

Each channel is strong and self-contained enough to live on its own, but can then be pulled together into a greater brand narrative. The most interesting part is that this pulling together doesn’t necessarily have to be done by one person - social relationships can help forge those connections, forming a **brand community that shares and builds on each others’ experiences** with the brand. I’ve seen the advertising, you’ve been to an event, she’s tried the product, he’s had a good experience with an employee, and **we all compare notes.**

In the world of brands, Faris mentions the example of Audi’s Art of the Heist campaign, but I think the big brands like Axe/Lynx, Nike, Dove, Apple, etc all work this way. They put lots of things out there, not necessarily expecting every person to see every piece, but **creating enough interestingness that people will talk** and eventually hear about pieces they haven’t seen from someone else. And of course, **social media means that these discussions are easier, are amplified**, and do not necessarily have to occur face-to-face or even in the same part of the world.”

Jason Oke (Leo Burnett, Toronto) Transmedia Planning & Brand Communities <http://lbtoronto.typepad.com/lbto/2006/10/>

YOUR STORIES ARE A BANKABLE RESOURCE

Learn how to weave a great narrative between channels, even (perhaps especially) if only for your



THE BIG 3 ESSENTIAL IDEAS

(the least you'll need to know)

Idea #1 Transmedia is not media-neutral or integrated planning, instead each medium take on a part of the overarching story that **suits that medium best**. Not just thin branding touchpoints but deep experiences in each.

Idea #2 Transmedia is about **worldbuilding**. Creating another dimension that fans can live out their passion in parallel to their everyday lives.

Idea #3 The most important job of the transmedia producer is to make the story extensions **come alive**, not feel fake and shallow.

REFERENCE WORKS

& RECOMMENDED RESEARCH LINKS

Recommended readings:

Transmedia 101: Confessions of an AcaFan (Henry Jenkins) 2007
http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html
 Welcome to Now: The Revolutionary power of transmedia storytelling 2009
<http://welcometonow.blogspot.com/2009/09/revolutionary-power-of-transmedia.html>
 Transmedia storytelling: getting started. Culture Hacker. 2010
<http://workbookproject.com/culturehacker/2010/07/07/transmedia-storytelling-getting-started/>
 Entertainment Reimagined. Wired 2010
<http://www.wired.co.uk/wired-magazine/archive/2010/08/features/what-is-transmedia>
 Next Gen Storytelling for the Multimedia Age. Brain Pickings 2010
<http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2010/08/24/news21/>
 Creators of Transmedia Stories: Narrative Design Exploratorium 2009
<http://narrativedesign.org/2009/09/creators-of-transmedia-stories-3-jeff-gomez/>

Social Currency Enrichment:

Jason Oke (Leo Burnett, Toronto) Transmedia Planning & Brand Communities
<http://lbtoronto.typepad.com/lbto/2006/10/>

Follow on Twitter:

@henryjenkins @goonth @avantgame @jeff_gomez @christydena @ivanovitch @stephendinehart

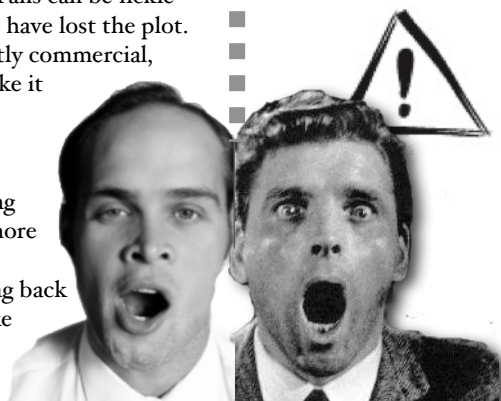
THE FLIP-SIDE

There's no success guarantee

..IT COULD GO EITHER WAY..

Transmedia is intellectually expensive, not to mention heavy on skills, time, oh and money. Fans can be fickle when they feel that the story creators have lost the plot. When extensions become too explicitly commercial, or don't follow the principles that make it engaging and enjoyable anymore, campaigns can suffer a backlash.

Marketers run the risk of fans deciding that the entire campaign is nothing more than one big advertisement. Which is a bore. Or sometimes stiking back and destroying the brand in their wake for their own amusement.



CASE STUDIES & SOCIAL CURRENCY

Google these transmedia case-studies for ideas and to marvel

- ☛ Lost
- ☛ True Blood
- ☛ Marvel Comics (track their amazing fan-driven history)
- ☛ Matrix
- ☛ Audi's "Art of the Heist"
- ☛ DarkKnight Returns
- ☛ Obama presential campaign
- ☛ District 9
- ☛ WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment)
- ☛ Times of India campaign
- ☛ Wizard of Oz
- ☛ the Beast (Microsoft) game created for Spielberg's AI
- ☛ I Love Bees
- ☛ Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty
- ☛ Pokemon

SOCIAL CURRENCY ENRICHMENT

"Include lots of **detail for fans to notice, to talk about and deconstruct together**. So you might have missed some of the details but someone else can point them out, and this gives you a deeper appreciation of it, and completes your picture of the whole a bit more.

Still, the challenge for brands is to **not just put in detail for detail's sake**, but to use it to truly make the brand more interesting, to give brand users something they will enjoy noticing and talking about.

So maybe that is a new starting point we should set out on our briefs: **does a brand community already exist, or will this communication do something interesting enough to create and support.**"